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SUBJECT: UN SMALL ARMS DESTRUCTION DAY IN KINSHASA

REF: KINSHASA 680

¶1. (U) The Ambassador marked the UN's Small Arms Destruction Day with a speech at the Congolese military's Central Logistics Base (CLB) July 9 at an event organized by the NGO Mines Advisory Group (MAG) to commemorate the destruction of more than one million small arms and light weapons (SALW) worldwide. The event also included a tour of weapons storerooms and a demonstration of SALW destruction. Congolese and UN military officers, as well as other diplomatic, NGO, and media representatives, also participated.

¶2. (U) The Ambassador's remarks emphasized USG leadership in arms reduction world-wide. He noted that Embassy Kinshasa provided USD 1.1 million in 2006 for MAG operations in the DRC, making possible the destruction of approximately 5,000 superfluous SALWs. He also announced that the USG intends to provide an additional USD 1 million to MAG in 2007 as it extends its work throughout the country.

¶3. (U) Participants were given tours of two storerooms holding SALWs awaiting destruction. The tours marked the first time civilians have been permitted to enter these areas. The MAG-SALW Program Director called this testimony to the transparency that MAG's work encourages. The event concluded with the destruction of a symbolic "millionth weapon."

¶4. (U) MAG, a London-based NGO, has played a key role in DRC security sector reform (SSR) since July 2004 by reducing the number of SALWs circulating throughout the country. MAG reported that it has seen "considerable expansion" within the past year thanks to USG support and become the largest humanitarian organization specializing in landmine, weapons, and arms clearance in the country. It cleared over 55,000 such items in 2006 and, in the past four months alone, destroyed over 27,800 arms in the DRC, primarily in Kinshasa, Mbandaka, Ikela, and Lumbubashi. Its work has been especially vital to securing parts of Mbandaka following a weapons depot explosion in mid-June which left five people dead and over 50 injured (reftel).

¶5. (U) Comment: This event served as a key opportunity to highlight the USG's continuing support of arms reduction throughout the world and underscored Embassy Kinshasa's support in professionalizing the Congolese military. It received extensive positive coverage in the local media. End comment.

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